

Top tips for overcoming test anxiety



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Feeling anxious about an upcoming test? The strategies below can be used before and during a test to help you cope with test anxiety.

BEFORE THE TEST

Simulate the test setting

In anticipation of an upcoming test, schedule some time to simulate what the test will feel like. For instance, if the test is two hours long, set yourself up in a quiet study space and work for two hours straight with no interruptions (i.e. don't check your phone or leave your chair). After this, sitting for a long test will seem less daunting.

Exercise

Get active to shake off those pre-test jitters. Exercise reduces anxiety and releases endorphins — or happy hormones — that can help you stay positive while writing your test.

Chill out

One or two hours before a test, calm your mind and do something relaxing and enjoyable. For example, listen to a favourite song, talk to a friend, watch a funny show or go for a walk.

Fuel up

It is important to feel energized and stay focused when you are writing a test. Before the test, eat a favourite healthy meal (this is not the time to try something new) and stay well-hydrated; avoid sugar and caffeine, which can increase your stress response.

Avoid 'knowledge stealers'

Although it is important to arrive on time (about 10 minutes before the test), arriving too early makes you susceptible to students who did not study effectively for their test; these students are frantic and eager to take advantage of your knowledge. These 'knowledge stealers' may even contribute to your test anxiety which you have worked so hard to combat. Listen to music through headphones while waiting to enter the room.

DURING THE TEST

Review the test

Review the test, note the number of pages, check the back of each page and read all of the instructions. First, complete questions you know well to boost your confidence. As you are working through the test, put an asterisk beside questions that give you difficulty; skip those questions, but be sure to come back to them later.

Keep an eye on the time

Most classrooms have clocks, but just in case, wear a watch to keep an eye on the time. When half of the time has passed, check to see if you have completed half of the test. For many students, breaking the test into chunks of time can help make it more manageable.

Practice relaxation

If you feel your anxiety rising before or during the test, take slow, deep breaths to calm yourself and reduce your heart rate. You may also want to try one of these other relaxation techniques:

Ground yourself in the room

Grounding is a relaxation technique that brings you into the moment and doesn't allow your anxiety to get the best of you. Listen to the noises in the room, feel the chair beneath you, notice the texture and weight of your pen or pencil in your hand and so on.

Relax your muscles one by one

Starting with your toes and working your way up to your head, tense and then relax each muscle as you take slow, deep breaths. When you are done, each muscle should be relaxed.

Put the test into perspective

Remind yourself that this is one test in one course in one semester in your entire program. Putting the test into perspective may help reduce any anxiety you are feeling. Be kind to yourself and tell yourself that you have prepared well and will do your best.

ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

As you write more tests, you will learn what works best to reduce your test anxiety. Some anxiety is normal because you want to do well, but keep it manageable. A mark on a test does not determine your self-worth. If you are experiencing extreme anxiety, you may benefit from speaking with someone. Book an appointment through the Campus Health Centre or the Coaching and Support Centre. Visit Student Academic Learning Services for academic support including more strategies you can use when writing tests and exams.